

A Review of “Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships”

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Knowing that it is important to closely involve families in the schooling and education of their children is not new. Advocates, educators, community organizers, and parents have been calling for more and better family-school partnerships for decades. For example, in the mid-1980s, Anne Henderson and her colleagues published *Beyond the Bake Sale: An Educator's Guide to Working with Parents* (Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986). On the other hand, it is more recent that a cohesive body of empirical evidence has been identified and disseminated indicating, with some degree of conclusiveness, that such partnerships can positively impact a whole host of school outcomes. Indeed, a growing number of studies highlight the positive associations between parent involvement in schools and their children's social and emotional development and academic achievement (Baker & Soden, 1997; Catsambis, 1998; Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Fan & Chen, 1999; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Shaver & Walls, 1998; VanVoorhis, 2001). Focusing on urban settings, Jeynes (2005) reported that the relationships between academic achievement and parent involvement hold across gender, race, socioeconomic status, and academic ability of students, and that these positive relationships demonstrate statistical significance not just for academic ability overall, but also for standardized tests, GPA, and other academic measures. As Henderson and her colleagues (2007) point out, “The more the relationship between families and the school is a real partnership, the more student achievement increases” (p. 3).

Given such findings, along with the current pressures on schools (e.g., No Child Left Behind; U.S. Department of Education, 2001) to reduce achievement gaps and enhance the academic achievement of all students, the need for public schools to actively seek and increase authentic forms of parental involvement is obvious (Howland, Anderson, Smiley, & Abbott, 2006). In their new book, *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships* (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007), the authors provide a research-based, practical set of strategies designed to help schools move beyond the cursory, static types of relationships with parents that have been so common in our K-12 schools, toward the development and sustainment of meaningful, dynamic relationships among schools and families.

Building directly from the research-focused monograph, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), *Bake Sale* provides readers with a compilation of innovative strategies, tools, and assessments that can be used immediately by any school to start connecting with families. The book is made up of four sections. Part I includes two chapters on why school-family partnerships are so important. Part II has two chapters that focus on how schools can go about building partnerships with families. Part III is a series of five chapters that examine the research base for school-family partnerships from a variety of different perspectives. The final section, Part IV, contains two chapters describing the wealth of resources that are available to schools and families for creating and maintaining partnerships. A real strength of this book is that each chapter after the first includes one or more checklists the reader can use right away to assess the current status of her or his school's partnerships. These assessments will be invaluable to school personnel as they work to understand the present state of their relationships with families and endeavor to improve and enhance the quality of those relationships.

The first chapter sets the context for the book, reminding the reader why school-home partnerships should be a central part of how a school functions. In Chapter 2, four levels of partnership in which schools can operate are presented: fortress; come-if-we-call; open-door; and partnership. Using rubrics supplied in the text, school personnel rate their school and then use this information to prepare the school for deeper relationships with families and also with the community. Chapter 3 presents a set of four core beliefs that schools need to adopt to move forward. Each of these beliefs includes a checklist and set of action steps for school personnel to assess and monitor their progress. The chapter also describes an empirically supported theoretical model that is important for understanding parental involvement in schools (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Developed by Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey and Howard

Sandler, the model posits three psychological constructs that explain why parents become involved in their children's education: (a) role construction (i.e., what parents believe they should do); (b) self-efficacy (i.e., what parents believe they can do) within the context of their children's education; and (c) parent perceptions of invitations (i.e., the degree to which parents feel the school welcomes, values, and expects their involvement). Of the three, invitation appears to be the most important (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Additionally, a fourth construct, parents' perceived life context (i.e., perceptions of other life demands that mediate school involvement), has been added to this model (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Though not discussed in this text, parents' perceived life context appears especially relevant for schools to engage families with increased demands on their time and energy, such as juggling multiple jobs, single parenting, and having children with disabilities.

Chapter 4 helps schools learn how to cultivate common ground with families by identifying mutually held interests, such as students' academic achievement. Specific to the development of mutually trusting relationships between parents and schools is Mapp's "joining process" (2003) which includes (a) welcoming parents into the school, (b) honoring their participation, and (c) connecting with parents by focusing on children and their learning. The book explains the joining process and uses examples to facilitate its implementation in any school. Chapter 5 extends the discussion of the joining process, describing how schools can put the focus of school-family partnerships specifically on learning and academic progress. One interesting example the authors share is the Parent Academic Liaison Program (PAL) in San Diego. PAL places certified teachers in high risk elementary schools to work to establish and sustain comprehensive parent involvement in these schools. Another powerful aspect of this chapter is the section on how schools can use student achievement data to drive school-family relationships, such as the "Five Steps for Focusing Your (School) Compact on Learning" (p. 102).

Chapter 6 is arguably the best chapter of the book. Even schools that are already successfully partnering with families from diverse ethnic, class, and cultural backgrounds will gain new ideas from this part of the book. And for schools that are not presently successful, the chapter offers not only a compelling rationale for relationship building, but similar to the rest of the book, provides processes and procedures for moving forward regardless of current status. The section on getting to know a community and its assets may be especially helpful for schools that are unsure of how or where to begin to bridge cultural disconnects between school personnel and families. Chapter 7 focuses more on how to help parents become advocates for their children and themselves than it does on dealing with "problem parents" – something implied by

the chapter's title. Although there are several sections that examine working with angry or "pushy" parents, the central idea underlying this chapter is that by helping families understand how schools operate, the potential of having parents who are frustrated or irate is reduced. Like the rest of the book, the chapter provides numerous tips from principals and "how to" examples.

Chapter 8, "Sharing Power," describes ways in which schools can more meaningfully involve families in schools. The focus is on understanding the power differentials that can exist between schools and families and then working to replace barriers with more democratic decision-making processes. Perhaps best summarized by the authors' point, "In a school community, action trumps talk" (p. 189), this chapter starts by describing how to support parents in becoming effective leaders in a school, followed by how to involve parents in action research projects in the school, and then moves to how to make connections among parents, the school, and community organizations. The authors remind the reader that democracy is not always easy and often is messy and uncomfortable, but that transparency brings with it many benefits for a school community.

Scaling up, the subject of chapter 9, provides several case examples of school districts that have made the commitment to build and maintain family partnerships in their schools. These real world examples serve to reiterate the importance of having a family-focused philosophy in the school. The role of leadership, starting with the superintendent, is stressed throughout the chapter. The last two chapters, 10 and 11, provide lists and descriptions of resources and tools that schools and families can access to implement and extend the ideas described throughout the text. This information will be useful to schools with well established family-school partnerships as well as for schools just beginning to develop connections with families. The book itself serves as such a practical tool that schools newer to the process will not need to spend a lot of time with this last section until they have worked through the first three sections of the book.

The strengths of this text lie in its practicality. Anyone can pick up and begin to use this book immediately. The authors are pushing educators beyond notions of using best practices to using evidenced-based practices. No doubt, education has a long way to go in this regard, but this text with its focus on research supported strategies is a good start.

Like any such text, this book is not without its limitations, one being that is not always clear which ideas are research-based and which ideas would be better considered as best practices. However, the text is rich with cited research studies making this not only an ideal book for school personnel, but also a useful book for teacher preparation programs. In addition, although the strategies

and concepts presented can be successfully implemented across grade levels, the book is primarily situated within an elementary school context. A specific examination of the unique challenges related to parent involvement at the secondary level would have been useful for educators, particularly with secondary parents perceiving reduced invitations for involvement (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). Perhaps the most obvious weakness of the book was the lack of attention given to partnerships with families having children with disabilities. Unfortunately, even though partnering with families has been a key component of federal special education law since its inception in the mid 1970s, there has been a problematic lack of attention given to this area.

Still, Henderson and her colleagues have made an invaluable contribution to the field; one that should be read by every individual seeking to improve K-12 education. In the authors' own words, schools can ill-afford to neglect family, school, and community partnerships:

The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more. (p. 2)

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